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Local Governance Implications of the Intricacies of the Political Change in Marienbad

1. Introduction

Mariánské Lázně (Marienbad) in Western Bohemia (part of the Czech Republic) is an architecturally beautiful and well-restored town yet at the same time a town whose population is ageing and decreasing at an alarming rate. Now, a politically unique situation brought about by the last municipal elections in October 2014 drew the attention of the entire country to this “lost” place.

For the first time after long decades, the mayor of the town is not a member of the established political elite. In the elections, a young architect Vojtěch Franta was the candidate number eight of the Czech Pirate Party (the “Pirate Party” or “Pirates”)², a civic activist and ex-chairman of an active local association that organizes cultural events.

For the Czech Pirate Party it was a first-ever victory in municipal elections. It won nearly double of the votes secured by the political movement ANO 2011.³ The movement had been the most popular political group at a national level and in Mariánské Lázně came second after the Pirates.

This article outlines some of the changes introduced during a six-month period after the elections in the administration of Mariánské Lázně by the new governing coalition of the Pirates, ANO 2011 and three other partners. These changes are consistent with the world-wide trend known as New Public Governance.

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² Vojtěch Franta leapfrogged from the eighth to the second place on the Pirate list thanks to preferential votes. Ondřej Knotek, the top candidate, did not seek the position of the mayor due to personal reasons.

³ The name ANO 2011 is a Czech abbreviation for “Association of Unsatisfied Citizens 2011”.

2. New Public Governance

It is widely accepted today that public administration in the European Union is (or should be) labeled in the development stage as (public) governance.⁴ We also encounter other names for this paradigm – Jerzy Hausner, for instance, uses the term “interactive governance”.⁵

Governance is a phase that started as a reaction to the economizing of New Public Management (NPM). Governance, unlike NPM, relies more on public participation, and less on pure economic measurability of results. Through the involvement of a wide array of stakeholders, governance seeks equilibrium between their interests. Public administration in the form of governance is more a coordinator and less a creator of public policies.⁶ The public administration is not there to make authoritative top-down decisions, but to activate the society to “self-governance”.⁷

3. Mariánské Lázně then and now

In the era of “real socialism” (1948–1989) the town’s architectural beauties were rather neglected. Not everything was bad though. The town had much more young visitors who contributed to a bustling night-life and cultural scene. In 1952 the Balneology Research Institute was established to study the nature and effects of healing assets used in spas.

The institute was closed in 1993 and has not been adequately replaced yet.⁸

⁴ See the four stages (paradigms) in the history of the science of public administration as suggested by Hubert Izdebski. There have been the following stages, in the chronological order: Rechtstaat (oldest) – Public Administration – New Public Management – Public Governance (most recent). According to Hausner, only the first two stages can be identified with the classic Weberian model of ideal bureaucracy. Hausner labels the other two stages with a common name of public management. J. Hausner, *W kierunku rządzenia interaktywnego*, in: A. Bosiacki et al. (eds.), *Nowe zarządzanie publiczne i public governance w Polsce i w Europie*, Liber, Warsaw 2010, p. 93.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 93–103.

⁶ H. Izdebski, *Nowe kierunki zarządzania publicznego a współczesne kierunki myśli polityczno-prawnej*, in: A. Bosiacki et al. (eds.), *Nowe zarządzanie publiczne i public governance w Polsce i w Europie*, Liber, Warsaw 2010, p. 25.

⁷ M. Zawicki, *Deficyty współzarządzania publicznego w Unii Europejskiej*, in: A. Bosiacki et al. (eds.), *Nowe zarządzanie publiczne i public governance w Polsce i w Europie*, Liber, Warsaw 2010, p. 114.

⁸ M. Smith, L. Puczko, *Health, Tourism and Hospitality: Spas, Wellness and Medical Travel*, 2nd revised edition, Routledge, London 2014. <https://books.google.cz/books?id=YEfIAgAAQBAJ&pg=PT539&lpg=PT539&dq=Balneological+Research+Institute+marianske+lazne&source=bl&ots=4ToDWNNEIX&sig=cwwwEOw1hjHqORR2ogcm37D2FyU&hl=cs&sa=X&ei=5kgEVbuABILkaTogKAH&ved=0CEIQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=Balneological%20Research%20Institute%20mariaanske%20la-zne&f=false> (14.03.2015).

Today, the town's scenery is spectacular, but its spirit seems to be sick and tired. During 25 years since the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, nearly 30% of the population is gone. In 1987 the town officially had 18,667 citizens, and in 2013 there were only 13,337 of them.⁹ It is difficult to find a job in the town in sectors other than spa and tourist industry.¹⁰ Big hotels are focused on large groups of visitors who usually don't spend much in the town, outside of their hotel.¹¹

A controversial privatization of the town's hospital in 2008 started a process that has created yet another problem. Mariánské Lázně has gained a worrying reputation of a spa town with inadequate health care system.¹²

As if Marienbad's decline in the last decades was only an episode, the basic characteristics of the town remain the same: *An architectural pearl, a town in the park and a park in the town. A treasury of healing mineral springs. A spa whose promenades remember famous personalities from around the world strolling on them.*¹³

4. October 2014 municipal elections

For sixteen years prior to October 2014, the mayor of Mariánské Lázně was always a member of ODS (*Občanská demokratická strana*), until recently the dominant center-right wing party in the Czech Republic. In that year's elections, however, ODS won only one seat in the town council. The unlikely but clear winner of the elections was the Czech Pirate Party while the political movement ANO 2011 came in second.

The Pirates are formed, in part, by the international grassroots movement, which is based on voluntary work of its members, on the principles of direct and deliberative democracy, and on the ideals of almost absolute transparency of public administration. ANO 2011, on the other hand, is a protest ("anti-political") movement founded by billionaire Andrej Babiš. The movement is often called the party of one man who wants to "manage the state as a firm."

⁹ ČSÚ, Regionální statistiky, "Czso.cz"; http://www.czso.cz/cz/obce_d/index.htm (15.03.2015).

¹⁰ Z. Kral, *Jsou Mariánské lázně městem pro mládě?* [Karlovarskenoviny.cz](http://www.karlovarskenoviny.cz) 16.03.2014; <http://www.karlovarskenoviny.cz/zpravy/regiony/kral-jsou-marianske-lazne-mestem-pro-mlade/> (16.03.2015).

¹¹ P. Holec, *Mariánské Lázně vede mladý pirát a architekt Vojtěch Franta. Chce oživit mrtvé město*, Hlavně nezemřít, "Euro.cz" 9.03.2015, y. 18, n. 6. http://euro.e15.cz/archiv/hlavne-nezemrit-1160921#utm_source=euro&utm_medium=selfpromo&utm_campaign=e15rss (15.03.2015).

¹² B. Zeman, *V Mariánských Lázních končí interna. Z nemocnice už zůstane jen torzo*, "Idnes.cz" 23.04.2014; http://vary.idnes.cz/nemocnice-v-marianskych-laznich-ukonci-provoz-interny-pgn-/vary-zpravy.aspx?c=A140423_2058658_vary-zpravy_slv (15.03.2015).

¹³ *O městě – Mariánské Lázně*, "Mumli.cz"; <http://www.mumli.cz/o-meste/zakladni-fakta/> (15.03.2015).

Ondřej Knotek, a leader of the Pirate Party's candidacy in the town, summarized the Pirates' offer for the voters: *We have focused on all generations and we started from the international pirate program. Our first pillar is the transparent management of the town and a broad involvement of the public in the decision-making process. Our second pillar is the provision of quality services for our citizens and visitors, particularly health care. The third pillar is focused on the positive development of our spa industry. We want to get inspired by the town's famous tradition and try to bring Mariánské Lázně back into the limelight. Until recently we had in our town the Department of Spa Medicine – a branch of the First Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Prague. We would like to resume the department's activities and explore possible new ways of utilizing the mineral springs in medicine.*

In the election campaign, the Pirates also presented a plan to motivate young people to settle in the town. Petr Třešňák, now the vice-mayor of the town, said: *The town can at least start building flats for these people. What is more, we can offer pieces of municipal land at advantageous but strict conditions for the candidates ... such as for instance their obligation to keep the registered place of residence in the town for a given period of time ... Similar techniques have already been used in many Czech municipalities with very good results.*¹⁴

The Pirates have also publicly subscribed to the program *Architecture for Local Politics* published by the Czech Chamber of Architects a few weeks before the elections.¹⁵ The program assumes that a strategic plan should be "the fundamental document of any town." The plan should reflect a vision of the municipality obtained in a broad public discussion (deliberation).¹⁶ *And following the strategic plan and a spatial plan, a continuous mediation process will be carried on between the town and its citizens... The planning sessions will be well prepared and facilitated.*¹⁷

The election campaign of the Pirate Party that brought about its masterful victory in Mariánské Lázně cost less than 50,000 thousand Czech korunas (EUR 1,800) in expenses. A complete list of the expenses is published on the internet.¹⁸

¹⁴ P. Tresnak, *Tohle město není pro mladý*, "Pirátiml.cz" 1.10.2014; <http://piratiml.cz/40-tohle-mesto-neni-pro-mlady> (15.03.2015).

¹⁵ *Záznam z jednání o shodě nad programovými cíli*, Česká Piratská Strana – ML, "Pirátiml.cz" 14.10.2014; http://piratiml.cz/download/Zaznamy_z_jednani_zastupitele_ml_2014.pdf (15.03.2015).

¹⁶ *Program Architektura pro komunální politiku*, "Čka.cz" 16.09.2014, Article 1. <https://www.cka.cz/cs/cka/tema-CKA/program-architektura-pro-komunalni-politiku> (15.03.2015).

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, Article 9.

¹⁸ *Rozpočet komunální kampaně Mariánské Lázně 2014*, Česká Piratská Strana, "Piráti.cz", <https://www.pirati.cz/regiony/karlovarsko/marianskelazne/rozpocet-kampan2014> (15.03.2015).

5. Post-election negotiations

After the announcement of the election results, the Czech Pirate Party maintained negotiations with all the other parties that won at least one seat in the town council. In the end a coalition agreement was signed with ANO 2011, Social Democrats, ODS and a local movement Volby 94 – 2014. All the participating subjects have declared a consensus on the most important goals of their political programs.¹⁹

The Pirate Party received offers of coalition from the other parties in the council as well. Although the offers were rejected²⁰, the Pirates expressed their will to involve all 21 members of the council in the administration of the town.²¹

The new coalition has presented an ambitious four-year program. The program mentions in the first place the *transparent and accountable management of the town* (which includes the *widest possible use of modern management methods*) and the *civic participation in decision-making*. These intentions are clearly influenced by the paradigms of both New Public Governance and New Public Management.

6. Late of 2014

In November, the newly elected representatives gathered in the town council for the first time. A new mayor and other members of a seven-member board of the town were elected. The Pirates held three seats on the board (including the Mayor and 2nd Vice Mayor), ANO 2011 two seats (incl. 1st Vice Mayor), and other two coalition partners one seat each.²² The fifth coalition partner (ODS) was not represented on the board.²³

The new board terminated the positions of PR Manager and Town Development Manager.²⁴ The reason was the board's doubt about whether they have been cost effective from the town's perspective.

The board approved amended rules about the presence of guests at the board's meetings. An experienced and widely respected representative

¹⁹ *Koaliční spolupráce*, Česka Piratska Strana – ML. TZ, "Píratiml.cz" 25.10.2014; <http://piratiml.cz/aktuality/tiskove-zpravy/46-tz-koalici-spuprace> (15.03.2015).

²⁰ As of the date when the Pirates received the alternative offer, the agreement with ANO 2011 and other partners had already been concluded.

²¹ *Povolební vývoj*, Česka Piratska Strana – ML. TZ, "Píratiml.cz", 5.11.2014; <http://piratiml.cz/aktuality/tiskove-zpravy/47-tz-povolebni-vyvoj> (15.03.2015).

²² *Usnesení č. ZM/3-6/14 z 1. zasedání zastupitelstva města dne 12.11.2014*, "Mumli. cz"; <http://www.mumli.cz/samosprava/zastupitelstvo/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

²³ A representative of the ODS was elected chairman of the financial committee of the town council.

²⁴ *Usnesení č. RM/540-541/14 z 2. zasedání rady města dne 25.11.2014*. "Mumli.cz"; <http://www.mumli.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

of the opposition was named a permanent guest of the meetings.²⁵ It was also decided that among the guests of a meeting there will always be the chairmen of relevant expert commissions of the board.²⁶

In December, the council started work on a revision of its own rules of procedure in order to facilitate participation of the public in the discussions.²⁷ It was also decided that when there is an issue on the agenda of the council's meeting that is related to any municipal entity, the director of such entity must attend such council's meeting.²⁸

The dates for town council's meetings in 2015 were established. The list prescribes eight meetings²⁹, which is a double of what is required by law.³⁰

The budget of the town for 2015 was approved.³¹ In comparison with the previous year, the new budget anticipates lower revenues and lower expenditures.

The board also approved a dismissal of the town's secretary due to a disciplinary offense.³²

At the very end of the year 2014 it was ordered that all future meetings of the board's expert commissions will be open for participation of general public.³³

7. Early 2015

In January the new government made a number of personal changes in some of the municipal organizations. For instance, the director of administration of the town's sport facilities was recalled due to his violation

²⁵ *Usnesení č. RM/518/14 z 2. zasedání rady města dne 25.11.2014*, "Mumml.cz"; *Ibidem* (15.03.2015); *Mariánské Lázně na prahu pirátské radnice*, "Deníkreferendum.cz" 31.10.2014; <http://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/19063-marianske-lazne-na-prahu-piratske-radnice> (15.03.2015).

²⁶ *Usnesení č. RM/519/14 z 2. zasedání rady města dne 25.11.2014*, "Mumml.cz" <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

²⁷ *Usnesení č. ZM/38/14 ze 3. zasedání zastupitelstva města dne 16.12.2014*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/zastupitelstvo/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

²⁸ *Usnesení č. ZM/37/14 ze 3. zasedání zastupitelstva města dne 16.12.2014*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/zastupitelstvo/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

²⁹ *Usnesení č. ZM/36/14 ze 3. zasedání zastupitelstva města dne 16.12.2014*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/zastupitelstvo/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

³⁰ *Act No. 128/2000 Coll. on Municipalities*, § 92 par. 1.

³¹ *Usnesení č. ZM/24/14 ze 3. zasedání zastupitelstva města dne 16.12.2014*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/zastupitelstvo/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

³² *Usnesení č. RM/612/14 ze 4. zasedání rady města dne 23.12.2014*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

³³ *Usnesení č. RM/615/14 z 5. zasedání rady města dne 30.12.2014*, "Mumml.cz" <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

of a non-competition clause. An open tender for his successor was announced.³⁴

Some personal changes were made in the supervisory board of the town's hospital. At the same time, the body was ordered to report to the town's council at least twice a year.³⁵

The rules of providing grants from the municipal Fund of Sport were amended.³⁶ The board's commission for culture was given the task of drafting new, clearer rules for providing grants from the municipal Fund of Culture.³⁷

In February the council decided to make public on the town's website not only minutes of the council's meetings, but also all the documents and attachments related to the adopted resolutions.³⁸ All meetings of the council can be watched live on the website.

A new director of the Department of Construction and Spatial Planning was selected in an open tender.³⁹

In the beginning of March, the town announced that all of its banking accounts will be made transparent as of 1 April 2015. The town's trading partners have been asked not to use any sensitive information in the payment instructions. If such information is provided, it will become publicly available on the internet in the town's account statements and the town will have no possibility to delete or edit such information.⁴⁰

The town's board decided that a separate department of internal audit will be created and its director will report directly to the mayor.⁴¹

Also in March, the board approved a policy statement of the new government. The document is conceived as a more detailed continuation of the coalition agreement entered into in November 2014.⁴²

³⁴ *Usnesení č. RM/17/15 ze 7. zasedání rady města dne 13.01.2015*, "Mumml.cz" <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

³⁵ *Usnesení č. ZM/42/15 ze 4. zasedání zastupitelstva města dne 20.01.2015*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/zastupitelstvo/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

³⁶ *Usnesení č. RM/25/15 z 8. zasedání rady města dne 20.01.2015*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

³⁷ *Usnesení č. RM/41/15 z 9. zasedání rady města dne 27.01.2015*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

³⁸ *Usnesení č. ZM/67/15 z 5. zasedání zastupitelstva města dne 10.02.2015*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/zastupitelstvo/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

³⁹ *Usnesení č. RM/80/15 z 11. zasedání rady města dne 17.02.2015*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

⁴⁰ *Transparentní účty města*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/transparentni-ucty-mesta-571cs.html>. (15.03.2015).

⁴¹ *Usnesení č. RM/87/15 ze 13. zasedání rady města dne 3.03.2015*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

⁴² *Usnesení č. RM/108/15 ze 14. zasedání rady města dne 10.03.2015*, "Mumml.cz"; <http://www.mumml.cz/samosprava/rada/usneseni/> (15.03.2015).

8. Conclusion

From the facts presented in this draft paper it is clear that in the first five months after the elections, the Pirates were focused on the first pillar of their program, namely *“the transparent management of the town and a broad involvement of the public in the decision-making process.”* The measures taken in this area include: making accessible for general public all meetings of the board's expert commissions, publishing on the internet all documents discussed by the town's council, making all the town's banking accounts transparent, creating a department of internal audit separated from the rest of the administration, granting to a representative of the opposition a status of permanent guest of the board's meetings, doubling the frequency of the council's meetings, preparing new rules of procedure facilitating the participation of citizens in the council's meetings, strengthening the communication channels between the council, the chairmen of expert commissions and directors of municipal organizations, terminating the positions with unclear benefits for the town, making the rules of using municipal funds more transparent.

So far we have not seen many measures taken in the areas of second and third pillar of the pirate program, that is the *“provision of quality services for citizens and visitors, and health care in particular”* and the *“positive development of the town's spa industry”*. Given the complexity and long – term nature of these issues, it will be interesting to see how they are dealt with by the new government in the months and years to come.

The approach of local administration to governing, relying strongly on what is emerging in literature as New Public Governance has been very much manifested recently in Mariánské Lázně. Although much more needs to be done, the example must be treated as very enlightening given the achievements so far. The pillars still waiting to be operationalized are largely long-term ones.

The most in-depth benefit of the newly perceived public governance is the shift from a total dependence on civil service towards society self-governance. Moreover, this substantive transformation is not just about enhancing the role of *veto players* in the processes of public administration decisions, but a reallocation of the nerve centre. Society is getting its share in governing, managing and taking responsibility for key problems touching local communities.

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Local Governance Implications of the Intricacies of the Political Change in Marienbad

Abstract

The paper offers a case study of the Mariánské Lázně administration as an example of the New Public Governance (NPG) approach ed in the Czech Republic. The focus is on the particular pillars representing the features of NPG. Until now, five months after the general election, the particular attention of the Pirate Party on the determinants of NPG objectives could be observed through: making all meetings of the board's expert commissions accessible for the general public; publishing all documents discussed by the town's council on the internet; making all the town's banking accounts transparent; creating a department of internal audit separated from the rest of the administration; granting the status of a permanent guest at the board's meetings to a representative of the opposition; doubling the frequency of the council's meetings; preparing new rules of procedure facilitating the participation of citizens in the council's meetings; strengthening the communication channels between the council on the one hand and the chairpersons of expert commissions and directors of municipal organisations on the other; cancelling the positions with unclear benefits for the town; and making the rules of using municipal funds more transparent. There are still more evident measures expected in the areas of the second and third pillars of the Pirates' program, that is the *provision of quality services for citizens and visitors, and health care in particular and the positive development of the town's spa industry.*

Keywords: governance, New Public Governance, interactive governance, the Pirates' government in Mariánské Lázně, pillars of the Pirates' governance programme

Skutki zawiłych zmian politycznych dla samorządu w Mariańskich Łąźniach

Streszczenie

Artykuł zawiera analizę przypadku działania administracji miasta Mariańskie Łąźnie jako przykładu zastosowania podejścia Nowego Rządzenia Publicznego (NRP) w Republice Czeskiej. Zaprezentowano w nim podstawowe założenia NRP. Pięć miesięcy po wyborach można zaobserwować szczególną koncentrację nowo wybranej Partii Piratów na elementach NRP, do których należą: umożliwienie mieszkańcom uczestnictwa w spotkaniach komisji eksperckich zarządu miasta, publikowanie w internecie wszystkich dokumentów dyskutowanych przez Radę Miasta, zapewnienie przejrzystości wszystkich rachunków bankowych miasta, utworzenie wydziału audytu wewnętrznego jako oddzielnej jednostki administracyjnej, przyznanie reprezentantowi opozycji statusu stałego gościa na posiedzeniach zarządu miasta, podwojenie częstotliwości spotkań Rady Miasta, przygotowanie nowych procedur ułatwienia partycypacji obywateli w spotkaniach Rady Miasta, umocnienie kanałów komunikacji między Radą a przewodniczącymi komisji eksperckich oraz dyrektorami organizacji miejskich, usunięcie z planów miasta działań nieprzynoszących jednoznacznych korzyści oraz zapewnienie większej przejrzystości reguł wykorzystywania funduszy miejskich. Wciąż oczekuje się bardziej wyrazistej postawy władz miasta w obszarze realizacji zamierzeń zawartych w drugim i trzecim filarze programu Partii Piratów, tj. „dostarczenie obywatelom i odwiedzającym wyższej jakości usług, a w szczególności usług ochrony zdrowia, oraz rozwój miejskiej działalności w branży spa”.

Słowa kluczowe: rządzenie – kreowanie elementów ładu społecznego, nowe rządzenie publiczne, rządzenie interaktywne, rządzenie Partii Piratów w mieście Mariańskie Łąźnie, główne elementy programu Partii Piratów